UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
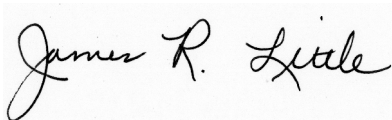Farm Service Agency
Washington, DC 20250

For: FSA Employees Except State and County Offices

Deploying Electronic Forms for Customers on the USDA Electronic Forms (eForms) Website

Approved by: Acting Administrator

James R. Little

1 Overview

A
Background

A new FSA, NRCS, and RD electronic commerce website went on-line December 16, 2000.

Note: Information about the website was distributed in Notice AO-1237.

The first service on the website is eForms. The USDA eForms website:

- provides selected forms for Service Center customers

- is intended to be the primary Internet source where agricultural producer customers can access forms used to participate in Agency programs and services.

Policies and procedures need to be implemented to facilitate fully using the eForms service. The objective is to integrate form development and approval processes for eForms into Agency standard operating procedures.

Disposal Date	Distribution
December 1, 2002	All FSA employees except State and County Offices

1   Overview (Continued)

**B
Purpose**

This notice:

- provides policy and procedure for:

  - developing forms
  - seeking the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) approval of forms

- requests program and administrative divisions to identify and prepare OMB approval requests for remaining forms completed by Service Center customers that have not been included on the new eForms service

- reiterates FSA policy to remove forms from all other public websites.

**C
Action**

FSA National Offices, EDSO, Kansas City Offices, and St. Louis Offices shall:

- immediately implement the policies in paragraph 2

- develop a prioritized list of forms to be added to the USDA eForms website and provide the list to Debra Myers, Chief, Forms, Graphics, and Records Branch, MSD, Stop 0565 no later than February 23, 2001

  Note: MSD will modify for on-line use, as necessary, and convert the forms into the OmniForms format based on the priorities provided.

- remove forms from all other websites no later than February 21, 2001.

2   Policies

A
Forms
Development

The usability of a form is directly related to good design and format. This is particularly true when forms are used as on-line information collection instruments. The Freedom to E-File Act (the Act) requires FSA, NRCS, and RD to modify forms into user-friendly formats and make forms available on the Internet. Some forms initially selected for deployment on the USDA eForms website had to be rejected because the format was not conducive to on-line use. To take full advantage of the Internet and comply with legislated requirements, forms shall be designed for easy on-line use.

Effective immediately, all new forms will be:

•   designed and formatted for optimum use on-line

•   converted to the OmniForms format for deployment on the USDA eForms website or the FFAS Employee Intranet forms service.

The FSA Forms Manager:

•   is responsible for meeting new form requirements
•   will assist FSA Offices in modifying existing forms and developing new forms.

2   Policies (Continued)

B
OMB Form
Approval

With a few exceptions, collecting information from the public requires approval from OMB. OMB's authority to perform this function comes from the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995.

OMB established a standard for placing forms for use by the public on the Internet. The standard was developed as part of the initial deployment of the eForms service. One key component of the standard addresses the content and format of on-line instructions.

Note: An example of approved on-line instructions with the compliant content and format is in Exhibit 1.

Public users of FSA's e-commerce services will not necessarily know if the information collection instrument on the Internet required OMB approval. They will notice differences in the content or quality of forms and instructions. FSA's goal is to provide consistent e-commerce services. Therefore, all on-line information collections shall follow the standard regardless of the requirements for OMB approval.

Note: The standard applies jointly to FSA, NRCS, and RD. The agencies are expected to maintain consistency across all deployed forms.

Effective immediately, instructions for all forms used to collect information from Service Center customers shall be provided in the format in Exhibit 1.

Requests for OMB approval of new forms and requests for reinstatement or extending a previously approved information collection shall include:

• the instructions for the public in the information collection package (ICP) provided to OMB

• language in the response to ICP, question 3, use of information technology, stating that the form will be placed on the USDA eForms website.

Requests to post forms on the eForms website that have current OMB approval for hard copy use can be made with a change worksheet rather than a new ICP. Deputy Administrators and the Regulatory Review and Foreign Investment Disclosure Branch are responsible for ensuring that change worksheets and ICP's include these instructions and that the instructions meet the content and format requirements in Exhibit 1. USDA's Departmental Information Collection Clearance Officer will not forward noncompliant requests to OMB.

2   Policies (Continued)

C
Completing the Forms Deployment Effort

The Act requires FSA to provide, to the maximum extent possible, agricultural producers with Internet access to all agency forms. The forms being made available are forms that Service Center customers are required to sign or use to provide information to FSA. FSA initially deployed 46 forms used by Service Center customers on the USDA eForms website. Many additional forms are used by Service Center customers but were not selected for deployment for various reasons, including:

*   no current OMB approval for the information collection
*   form format made on-line use impractical
*   form did not meet the criteria in Notice AO-1227, subparagraph 4 B.

Forms used by Service Center customers that were not initially selected, or selected and subsequently rejected, need to be prepared for deployment on the USDA eForms website. Actions to prepare remaining forms for deployment may include:

*   modifying the form for efficient on-line use or converting the form to the OmniForm format

*   obtaining current OMB approval for the information collection

*   developing instructions for the form and obtaining OMB approval.

All remaining forms that Service Center customers are required to sign or use to provide information to FSA shall be identified by Deputy Administrators by February 23, 2001. Instructions and change worksheets or ICP's for the identified forms shall be prepared for deployment within 60 days of the date of this notice.

2   Policies (Continued)

D
Single Public
Access Forms
Site

Several FSA National Offices, State Offices, and Service Centers have made various forms available on the Internet in a variety of formats, predominately the PDF format. A standardized tool and format for on-line forms, called OmniForms, has been selected and Service Center Agencies have elected to provide on-line forms through the single website **www.sc.egov.usda.gov**. These approaches were taken to:

- consolidate services for FSA, NRCS, and RD Service Center customers to simplify access to services

- take advantage of the security and management services of USDA's web farm architecture

- realize the economic benefits of consolidating service delivery tools

- ensure that on-line services are compliant with OMB requirements.

Notice AO-1277, subparagraph 4 B requires FSA Offices to remove forms from any existing websites within 60 calendar days of the date the common forms tool is deployed. The final date for removing forms is February 14, 2001. FSA Offices have an additional week to complete this task. Links from individual websites to the eForms website may be utilized at the discretion of the Deputy Administrator or SED. The FSA Webmaster can provide assistance in establishing these links.

Required Format for <u>Instructions for Public Forms on the USDA eForms Website</u>

**A
Instruction
Requirements**

The online user instructions for eForms must contain the following:

- form number and title of the form for which the instructions apply

- the purpose of the form and who uses it

  Example: This form is used by lenders to request a loan note guarantee for a Section 502, single family housing guaranteed loan.

- which items on the form must be completed by the user

  Example: All items on this form are to be completed by the transferor. The transferor is the lender who is selling the loan(s) to an RHS approved lender and/or transferring the servicing of the loan(s) to another lender.

- how to submit the completed form and whether it is to be FAXed or mailed

  Example: Mail all completed forms and any attachments to your local FSA Office.

- a 2 column instruction table with headings "Fld Name/Item No." in the first column, and "Instruction" in the second

- field names must be included in the first column and an instruction for each field on the form.

  Note: **Do not** use "self-explanatory" as a field instruction.

Use the Microsoft Word 97 template to format the instructions. The template is available at U:/wpforms/eformstemplate.doc. MSD, Forms and Graphics Section, will convert the file to HTML format for release on the eForms website after the form and instructions have been approved by OMB.

See subparagraph B for an example of on-line user instructions. The USDA eForms website also provides other examples of instructions for the forms available there.

Required Format for Instructions for Public Forms on the USDA eForms Website (Continued)

**B
Example of
Public Forms
Instruction
Format**

The following is an example of the format for on-line instructions for public forms. Use Arial and Times New Roman 12 point fonts. The instructions must follow the template format exactly.

Instructions For CCC-576

NOTICE OF LOSS/APPLICATION FOR PAYMENT – NONINSURED CROP DISASTER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Producers use this form to notify FSA of a loss in crop production to establish eligibility for benefits under the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program.

Submit the original of the completed form in hard copy or facsimile to the appropriate FSA servicing office.

Producers must complete Items 4 and 5, items 7 through 18, and item 35.

Items 1- 3 are for FSA use only.

Items 4-6

Fld Name / Item No.	Instruction
4 Producer Name and Address	Enter your name and address.
5A Telephone Number	Enter a telephone number where FSA can reach you. More than one number may be entered.
5B E-Mail Address	Enter an e-mail address where FSA can reach you. More than one address may be entered.

Item 6 is for FSA use only.